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This publication includes a series of articles on obtaining grants in theological education, reprinted from the newsletter of the Association of Theological Schools' Faculty Resource Center. They are: (1) "Grantseeking: Time Is Money"; (2) "Types of Grants: Knowing the Grants Landscape"; (3) "Getting Started: Preparing To Submit a Grant Proposal"; (4) "Writing the Proposal: Position, Persuasion, and Passion"; (5) "Developing the Method"; (6) "Suggestions for Constructing a Budget"; and (7) "Letters of Reference." The publication includes an introduction, "Writing Effective Proposals." (EV)

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FACULTY RESOURCE CENTER

Seeking Funding:
A Manual for Faculty in Theological Education

With an Introduction by Judith A. Berling
Graduate Theological Union
"Writing Effective Proposals:
Candid Suggestions for Theological Faculty
Preparing Grant Proposals"

and

A series of articles by Cheryl Tupper
reprinted from the newsletter of the
Faculty Resource Center

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Writing Effective Proposals: Candid Suggestions for Theological Faculty Preparing Grant Proposals

by Judith A. Berling

Over the past twenty years, I have had a range of experiences with the joys and frustrations of faculty seeking funding for their research. While I was Dean of the Graduate Theological Union, we established the first Faculty Grants Office in a freestanding theological school. The GTU Faculty Grants Office served our community for five years, and then became the Faculty Resource Center of the ATS, for which I served on the initial Advisory Committee. Serving on selection committees for five competitive fellowship programs has provided me with another perspective about what makes for a solid grant proposal. Applying for grants to support my own work has given me considerable experience as an applicant, sometimes successful, sometimes not. This essay is intended as practical advice and candid reflection on what I have learned from seeing the faculty grants process from all sides.[1]

Most faculty are comfortable with and proficient in the academic genres of their particular sub-field, be it biblical studies, church history, or womanist theology. Each of these subfields has its distinctive conventions for academic writing and a set of issues that are addressed by the field.

The challenge for many faculty is that grant writing is a separate genre, with a distinctive audience. And unless one has served on selection committees, the nature and characteristics of the audience for grant proposals is unknown, making decisions seem more mysterious and arbitrary than is the case. Faculty are often well aware of the audience of their *project*, but they are less certain about the audience for their *proposal*. Because effective communication always entails writing for one's audience, it is important to consider the audience of the proposal and the context in which the proposal will be read. What follows is common sense, offered with the hope that it will provide some specific notion of the practical context of the genre of the grant proposal.

The Audience and Context of a Grant Proposal

a. The selection committee is broader than a sub-discipline.

When faculty give papers within highly specialized sub-disciplines, submit articles or reviews to highly specialized newsletters or journals, read books in their fields, or attend specialized colloquies, they are moving within narrow worlds of shared vocabulary and theoretical assumptions. Faculty have fine-tuned academic voices for a particular stream of academic discourse.

However, virtually all research grants are broader than a subdiscipline. To be successful grant writers, faculty must articulate the substance and significance of their work in a broader context. Theological faculty apply for grants for which selection committees will represent one or all of the following: a broad range of theological disciplines, scholars from many theological backgrounds, and scholars from the humanities and/or social sciences. Members of selection committees are chosen for their excellence as scholars and for their interest in a range of intellectual and scholarly issues, so that they will not simply be "advocates" for their own discipline or sub-discipline. Yet even those with broad interests cannot be specialists in all the sub-disciplines, because they do not know or share the technical vocabularies and the epistemological biases, nor do they have knowledge of the "important issues" in a sub-field, the state of debates in the literature of all the sub-disciplines, or a consensus about the direction of a subfield.

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[1] When Cheryl Tupper, former director of the ATS Faculty Resource Center, asked me to write this essay, she shared a copy of "On the Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions" by Adam Przeworski and Frank Solomon, published by the Social Science Research Council. I read their essay with great interest and want to acknowledge its role in inspiring and shaping my own reflections. I also wish to thank Cheryl Tupper, Maija Beattie, and Kathleen Kook, three respected colleagues who read this essay in draft form and provided valuable comments and suggestions.

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Clearly, to write for a selection committee, applicants must make clear and explicit what they assume or merely make reference to in writing for their own sub-fields. A grant proposal must orient its readers succinctly and pungently to the issues in which the proposal is grounded and their significance both for the sub-field and for a wider academic audience.

b. Selection committee members read a great many proposals in a brief period.

This obvious and even banal fact has important consequences, as any faculty who has worked intensively through a large stack of papers already knows.

Effective grant proposals are memorable and begin with something engaging and significant. An engaging introduction grabs the attention of the reader and provides a momentary peak in hours of reading. Clarity and directness of style are also much appreciated by readers who must read dozens of applications; there is no time to spend excavating shards of insight from turgid prose. Grant proposals need to be written in a fluid, even scannable style, so that a reader can quickly locate a key point, in order to defend the proposal in committee deliberation. The effective proposal will not only communicate its substance, but also garner the interest of a reader from another field.

c. Grant competitions are often highly competitive.

With an increase in the number of faculty applying for a steady or shrinking number of grants, some grant competitions are very competitive. In some cases, staff review applications and eliminate those which they deem not competitive, without sending them on to the selection committee. In other cases, the committee does this work itself.

It is important that applicants take care so as to make this vital first cut. The primary criteria are:

1. Has the applicant supplied all of the required information by the deadline?

2. Does this grant meet the criteria of the program?

These two points seem easy to meet, and indeed they are. But it is the case that faculty sometimes pay insufficient attention to the preparation of proposals and thus miss the cut.

Grant deadlines are firm because the materials must be assembled and prepared for reviewers on a fixed deadline. If the competition is stiff, staff will not include applications that are incomplete as of the deadline.

The second point is even trickier. Faculty (and I am guilty of this myself at times) become so engrossed in the intellectual substance of their project that they spend inadequate time in the proposal demonstrating that *it meets the criteria of the grant program*. No matter how fascinating a project is, if it does not meet the criteria, it will not be funded. And, because of the large numbers of applications, reviewers have to be able to *glance quickly at the proposal and verify that it meets the criteria*.

A good rule of thumb is to share your proposal and the grant criteria with a few colleagues outside of your sub-field. Ask them if they can see that your proposal meets the criteria of the program, and whether they understand your explanation of the project.

d. The selection committee reviews and decides on the basis of the proposal.

This is a common-sense point, but one sometimes forgotten, particularly by faculty with an excellent research record.

The grant is not decided on the basis of the past reputation or accomplishments of the applicant. Even if those two factors are strong, it is *this particular proposal* that must carry the weight of the application. I have served on committees which, with some anguish, turned down applications from highly regarded faculty colleagues because the applicants had not given sufficient care to articulating their particular proposals. Despite our respect for these persons, their proposals did not and could not compete with more carefully polished applications. Committees must decide on the basis of the proposal actually before them.

e. A well-prepared proposal requires an investment of time and takes the application process seriously.

When there are more "good" proposals than can be funded, the quality of preparation of a proposal can give it an edge over other worthy applications. A high quality proposal requires time to prepare, and faculty should begin the process well in advance of the deadlines.

The first evidence of care is that the applicant attended to all guidelines and provided all requested information. If this has been done well, it is evident that this application is appropriate for this competition and is not simply a boiler-plate proposal sent to multiple funders without attention to the guidelines of each grant program.

Second, the depth of preparation of a proposal is manifested in the following:

- There is a clear thesis statement for the project.
- It is clear how the project will proceed (methodology, timeline).
- Outcomes and products are specified, and these fit the grant guidelines.
- Significance and importance is stated: Who cares about this project? To what audience(s) will it contribute?
- There is evidence of why the applicant is the most appropriate person to do this project: how it builds on and grows out of his or her previous work, what particular tools and backgrounds the applicant brings.
- There is an awareness of how the project is located in terms of other scholarship and other scholars.
- There is a solid and thoughtful bibliography that helps to "place" the project within the world of scholarship.
- The budget has been thoughtfully prepared; it is realistic, matches the description of the methodology of the project, and follows the guidelines of the grant.
- Appropriate references have been listed.

Needless to say, such thorough preparation takes time. It is critical to begin well in advance of the deadline. Allow lead time for items often left to the last moment, such as budget and references.

f. Proposals are often reviewed within their larger context(s).

No project stands alone, and this is particularly true of a project for which funding is sought.

Reviewers are interested in the role this project plays in the applicant's ongoing work, or the work of others with whom she or he has collaborated or been in conversation. Applicants for small grants, in particular, often need to explore how this small grant helps build on (brings to completion or turns a significant corner on) an ongoing project, or how it is preparing the way for a larger project in the future.

Applicants for larger grants are asked to place this project within their own writing trajectory or that of a larger field.

In some cases, a project must be demonstrated to contribute to the "world" of the grant program itself, or the world which the program seeks to serve.

Conclusion

In this brief essay I have sought to provide practical advice on the art of writing effective grant proposals by focusing on the importance of recognizing the audience and context of this genre of writing. Each grant program has its own distinctive character; applicants are urged to research and attend carefully to the guidelines of programs to which they apply. Moreover, the various fields of theological studies differ markedly in terms of the grant programs to which one might apply and the specific strategies for success in those applications.

This manual contains a number of helpful articles commissioned by the Faculty Resource Center. It is a practical resource as well as a source of specific guidance and counsel.

Grant proposals are written for a distinct audience quite different from that of standard academic writing. It is wise for faculty to ground themselves in the literature about grant writing and work to adapt to the requirements of the genre as they develop grant proposals.

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Grantseeking: Time is Money

I am often asked what is the most important piece of advice I can give to grantseekers. This question gives me pause not because I lack an answer, but because I hesitate to pronounce any one aspect of grantseeking as more important than another. I do, however, feel that there are fundamental tenets a grantseeker must adhere to in order to have the greatest chance of being successful. One of the fundamentals that I espouse over and over again when consulting on grant funding is allowing adequate lead time to secure funding.

Allowing enough time to pursue a grant is important for a number of reasons. First, many grant programs have one annual deadline date. People who begin looking for funding a year prior to the start of a project may have already missed a deadline for a grant or fellowship appropriate to their funding need. Starting early to identify possible funding sources gives a scholar access to the full range of grants available.

Second, beginning the process well in advance of the start of the project allows for ample planning time to consult with others—especially experts in the field—to solicit feedback on early drafts of a proposal, and to get input from program officers who administer the grants program. I have read many grant proposals that I felt would be strengthened and be more competitive if others, apart from the main applicant or applicants, had read them and offered opinions.

Structuring an unhurried timeline for grant writing also allows the process to rest at critical times. Giving some distance to a project often provides a fresh perspective or raises an important but overlooked activity or process that should be included. Individual fellowships always require letters of recommendation. I suggest that a person being asked to write a letter of recommendation receive an early draft of the proposal since, once again, he or she may have substantive comments on the project that, if valid, could both bolster support of the project and make an all around better project.

As a rule of thumb I recommend that one begin the process of seeking funding—and this relates to both individual research projects and collaborative projects—at least 18 months in advance of when the project or program is scheduled to begin. This amount of time may seem excessive, especially if you are not certain that far in advance of the specifics of the proposed research or program. At that point, however, the specifics may not be necessary. What is necessary is knowing the topic, scope, and anticipated outcome of the project; the type of grant funding that is desired; and an estimate of how much funding is needed. With that information, it should be possible to begin identifying the potential funding sources. Give yourself the best chance of obtaining funding by establishing a timeline of activities early in the process and adhering to it.

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Types of Grants: Knowing the Grants Landscape

As an initial step, grantseekers need to understand the variety of grants available and the differences among them. Traditionally, funding for scholarship has been in the form of individual fellowships designed to provide salary support during a sabbatical or leave of absence. These still remain a significant source of financing scholarly research, although it is important for scholars to know that there are ways to support research that are not tied to a leave from one's institution. I identify funding by three categories: (1) major individual fellowships, (2) collaborative or project grants, and (3) small grants, stipends, and awards.

Major Individual Fellowships—Major individual fellowships are the most desirable and therefore, the most competitive. Within this group I further identify two types of individual fellowships: restricted and unrestricted. By *unrestricted* I mean those humanities fellowships that are eligible to any scholar (with a Ph.D.) at any academic rank to do research in any appropriate discipline. Furthermore, the unrestricted fellowships are not tied to residency at any particular location. There are three national fellowship programs that fit this description: ACLS, NEH, and John Simon Guggenheim.

Fellowships that I refer to as *restricted* may be restricted in any number of ways including academic rank or number of years since receipt of the doctorate, residency at a research facility, or by topic or discipline for the research project. These fellowships are usually less competitive because the restrictions limit the pool of eligible applicants.

Collaborative Project Grants—Given the move toward collaborative and interdisciplinary research, the individual fellowship is often not adequate to meet the costs incurred in a major research project. Support from a private foundation is more likely to be available for a project that involves a team of scholars and one that is broader in scope than an individual project. Although the work may be conceived, conducted, and coordinated by a specific individual, these grants are applied for and received by an institution. An advantage to this type of funding is that, in contrast to individual fellowships, there are budget items such as supplies and clerical assistance related to the project that can be funded. The indirect costs of the research may be included in the requested budget although this does vary greatly depending on the funding source. An additional area of funding available in this type of grant, again not provided by fellowships, is that of planning. In order to develop a well-constructed collaborative project, it is recognized that the planning process itself requires funding. Many foundations will support this critical stage of a project.

Small Grants, Stipends, and Awards—A scholar may require funding on a much smaller scale than that provided through an individual fellowship or project grant, such as a stipend to support research during the summer, travel to a particular research collection, or research assistance during a specific phase of a project. These are just a sample of the kinds of funding that might be needed depending on the nature and point in time of a scholar's work. Also included in this category are awards for work completed, commonly in the form of book awards. Although these awards are usually in modest amounts, the recognition they engender can be useful in competing for a future grant.

Sometimes funding may be sought through a combination of the above-mentioned types of grants. For example, a group of scholars may have received a large, multi-year grant from a private foundation to support a comprehensive research project that includes activities such as conferences, outside consultation, clerical support, or manuscript preparation. An individual scholar involved in a collaborative project may seek an individual fellowship during the time of the project to support his or her contributed work since a collaborative research grant does not usually include major salary support for individual scholars (other than perhaps the project director).

Strategy is important to the funding process. To be successful you need to know the kinds of funding that are available and that are appropriate to your needs. For those new to grantseeking, start modestly. Identify those smaller grants such as the NEH summer stipend or the AAR individual and collaborative research awards that are not as competitive as the prestigious national fellowships, yet build your credibility. If you are directing a collaborative project and seeking foundation support, include people with name recognition and a proven track record to strengthen your application, but be sure their role is central and not peripheral. The bottom line is always to do your homework. Gather as much information as possible and make decisions based on knowledge of the complete grants landscape.

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Getting Started: Preparing to Submit a Grant Proposal

The preparation prior to submitting a grant proposal can be the most critical phase in the process. I recently heard a foundation officer say that 80 percent of grant seeking is in the research stage and the remaining 20 percent is in the writing. This seems contrary to what many people consider the most determining factor in getting funding—namely a perfectly crafted document. This does not mean to dismiss the importance of a well-written proposal which is an integral part of the process. However, there are a number of essential steps in laying the groundwork prior to proposal submission.

Knowing the Foundation—Most program officers will tell you that the most common reason for rejecting a proposal is that the request does not meet the funder's interests and priorities. This points to the fact that the applicant did not do his or her homework. Submission of a wrongly directed proposal wastes the time and energy of both the applicant and the funding agency. Program officers lament the tremendous increase in the number of funding requests that come across their desks, and a proposal that does not fit the guidelines will not ingratiate your organization to them.

There are concrete, basic methods of conducting the research on the nature of a foundation. An essential first step is to get the guidelines and application materials directly from the organization and be certain that they are complete and up-to-date. Grant seekers often locate a funding agency that seems to fit their funding needs in a published directory. Similarly, a grant recipient may be listed who has received a grant for a purpose comparable to what you are proposing. A more complete investigation is necessary because: (a) the directory may be out of date and therefore the funder may have changed the funding interests and priorities or (b) a listed grant recipient may have received the grant based on a special relationship with the funder but, in fact, would not normally fall within the funder's areas of interest.

Networking with Colleagues—Particularly for those who are new to the grantseeking enterprise, a helpful way to begin is to look to those experienced in the field. Not only can you get invaluable information about a funder which is not in print, but most professionals are willing to give advice and guidance. For example, a colleague may know that a funding agency is in the process of changing its direction or emphasis but the change has not yet been made public. There may also be pet interests or biases present within the board or staff that are known to insiders but are not common knowledge. I have picked up as much useful information in conversation with peers in my field as I have from funders directly. A word of caution, however, is not to get so carried away with asking for information that you get bogged down by conflicting perspectives.

Direct Contact with the Funder—Nothing substitutes for direct interaction with a staff member at a funding organization. My impression is that prospective applicants are timid about picking up the phone and speaking directly to a program officer to learn if what they are proposing fits with the funder's initiatives. This does not mean that the above mentioned steps should be circumvented; it does mean that after the preliminary steps are followed and you have a good sense of the funder, call to see if they feel your project is an appropriate and timely match with their current funding priorities. Not only can you get a direct and concrete response, but if there is interest you may also receive advice on how to shape the proposal.

I once heard a program officer say that the reason she is in her job is because she enjoys the opportunity to help create and design innovative programs. Program officers are mainly interested in seeing you succeed, and if your program is well matched to their funding initiatives, then they are committed to the very best result. In essence *your* success is *their* success. Get rid of the notion of program officers as Draconian bureaucrats who delight in nixing grant requests! I have found them to be knowledgeable, helpful, and professional. I should say that it is not always possible to reach a staff member directly, but I think more often than not you will get someone willing to talk with you. You may be asked to submit a letter summarizing the project which understandably gives the person a more detailed account of your proposed project.

In summary, there is a factual research component to grantseeking as well as a personal cultivation. Cultivating a grantmaking organization is not unlike cultivating an individual donor. The relationship is key. They need to know who you are, have confidence that you can carry out the task at hand, and know that you will make good use of the resources given.

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Writing the Proposal: Position, Persuasion, and Passion

I begin with the assumption that you have done the necessary groundwork and have targeted the funding sources that hold the most promise of supporting your project. Putting your proposed plan and request on paper takes time and careful attention, but it does not need to be the "shot in the dark" that many believe it to be. There are some basic things to keep in mind and to use as touchstones during the writing process. The three points I will address here are position, persuasion, and passion—the three P's, if you will, of proposal writing.

Position—Whether you are writing a proposal for a major fellowship to fund your individual research or writing for a large, collaborative, multiyear project, the concept of positioning the work is essential. Positioning encompasses the audience the work will inform (or put more dramatically, who *cares* whether the work is done at all), how it intersects with the interests and concerns of the funder, and how it connects to other timely, broader scholarly or social issues. These questions need to be answered as directly as possible in the proposal, the reader should not be left guessing or presuming. Too often a research project stands in isolation from other critical issues that are evolving simultaneously. Being able to connect to a larger context can make the difference as to whether or not the work is seen as relevant. Many scholars were trained to generate scholarship that is narrow and specialized, and in some disciplines that model still dominates. An increasing trend, however, is to move out of a narrowly focused approach and put ideas and concepts into a larger, contextual framework.

Persuasion—The tone and style of a proposal should convince the reader that this is something *important*. Consider the volume of applications a typical reviewer will have to read (often 50-60) for any given competition and this point is self-evident. I know that when I read numerous proposals in a single sitting, they begin to become indistinguishable from one another. What makes a proposal stand out is that, even if it is outside my area of expertise, the writer draws me in, makes the case, and convinces me of the contribution the proposed work will make.

Passion—Passion is essential to a persuasive proposal! It conveys a scholar's own excitement and enthusiasm for the proposed work. We all know that there are times when we become too close to our work and lose perspective. For academics who pursue the same basic topic over the course of a career, this may be even more the case. The salient issue here is to imbue the writing of a proposal with a passion for the work that you will be spending many hours and, if funded, many dollars, to accomplish.

When I talk to successful scholars about their scholarship and how they maintain a commitment to their work, the response from each individual is basically the same: they do it because they have something new and important to say and they will find the way to say it despite interruptions and overwork. This passion is what a reviewer looks for as assurance that this person is likely to carry through and do what is being proposed.

The language in a proposal should not be difficult or needlessly cryptic. Remember to find out the composition of the panel to which you are writing. Is it a panel of peers knowledgeable about your topic or are they generalists who may know little, if anything, in your area? Of course, if your grant proposal is *not* approved, that doesn't mean it's not a good project and a well-written application. Grants programs are competitive, and you may have to prepare for a resubmission in order to achieve success.

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Developing the Method

Writing a grant proposal requires attention to many different aspects of a project: why it needs to be done, who will do it and how are they qualified, what is the expected outcome, what is the timeline, what are the resources needed, and how it will be evaluated. These are all important areas to address in constructing a proposal, but one that is frequently underdeveloped or even ignored in the proposal narrative is the specific method by which the goals and objectives will be met.

The plan for accomplishing the desired outcome of a project differs somewhat depending on the nature of the work. For example, a grant proposal that seeks funding for the writing of a biblical commentary will describe a methodology differently than one which deals with a project involving a study of spiritual formation programs in seminaries. Regardless of which type of project a faculty member undertakes, a thorough description of the way he or she will execute it is critical for a grant proposal to be successful.

In the writing of proposals to fund scholarly work, methodology is often defined by the discipline. History, biblical studies, systematic theology, all have accepted methodologies that are known and evident to those within the discipline. This does not mean, though, that those reviewing the proposal will be knowledgeable about the methodology to be employed. Furthermore, not only is it necessary to describe well the method to be used, but the rationale and purpose of the method should be clearly articulated. This may be particularly important when a multidisciplinary approach is used. What is the significance that the method(s) bring to the research, and how do they help the work relate to other issues and inform a broader audience?

For those projects that go beyond the singular, scholarly piece of work and involve a larger, collaborative study or program, methodology is more encompassing; in other words, methodology includes all the activities that will be involved in accomplishing the final outcome. These activities might include a host of activities such as the use of outside consultants, conferences, surveys, or other processes designed to meet the broad goal. It is absolutely critical that each activity be presented in concrete, tangible terms that also describe the purpose and function of the proposed activity. In this type of collaborative grant proposal, the activities are often costly and complex; therefore the funder needs to understand why the activities are necessary and relevant to meeting the goal of the total project.

Each of these suggestions is contingent on a much larger part of the grantseeking process—which is thoughtful and thorough planning. As one foundation program officer stated, "the planned execution of a project must be well conceived and specific, and must reflect the kind of 'thinking through' that can be construed as a predictor of success. I want to know how the people making the proposal believe they will accomplish their purpose."

Do not assume that because you have convinced a funder that a project is timely and important the funding will be forthcoming. With increasing competition for decreasing dollars, there is also increasing scrutiny of how well a project is designed (and defined), indicating how likely the investment will result in a positive outcome.

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Suggestions for Constructing a Budget

One of the more critical, and frequently misunderstood, aspects of proposal writing is preparation of the budget. Too often the budget is left until the final stage of proposal preparation, and consequently thrown together in haste. This can compromise the quality of the proposal and ultimately jeopardize the success of getting funded, or the quality of a project when funding is granted.

A well-prepared budget requires adequate time to do the necessary background work. If you are unfamiliar with budget preparation, seek out the assistance of those who are, most likely your institution's business manager or a colleague who is experienced in budget preparation. Of course the first step should be to review the foundation's guidelines or requirements regarding the budget, but if you're stuck on how to present a certain expense or what might be the acceptable allocation, pick up the phone and talk to the person who can most knowledgeably answer your question. Often, the foundation program officer can provide helpful assistance as well.

Faculty members are not always aware of the total cost of program operation. Expenses for things such as telephone, fax, postage, and supplies add up quickly, and if a project director doesn't include them in the budget, those expenses will have to be met by the institution to operate a grant. A further word of advice is that even though some foundations pay a percentage of the grant for indirect costs, don't assume that these types of costs will all be covered. Indirect cost is the support the institution received for providing the environment to conduct a project; the funds can be used for whatever purpose the institution deems necessary that cannot be directly assigned a line item. Not all foundations support indirect costs, so ask the foundation you are working with about this and if these costs are supported, ask them the maximum percentage allowed. This information does not usually come voluntarily so be certain to ask. Including routine expenses as line items may mean more labor in tracking costs, but it's well worth the effort. An additional point to remember is that all direct line item expenses need to be included in financial reports whereas indirect costs do not.

In the final stages of preparing the budget, go through the described activities and see that they all have adequate funding in the budget. A reader of the grant proposal should be able to look from the narrative description of the program to the budget and find each with a line item indicating the costs and where the funds will be accessed and vice versa. The reviewer or program officer should not have to question whether the activities are adequately covered, whether the budget items are inflated, or any costs unsubstantiated.

Calculations of particular line items should be as exact as can be realistically expected. For example, if travel is involved, it is not advisable to include a line item that says merely "travel —$6,000." It should be clear who is doing the traveling, to what destination, for what purpose, and what other costs will be incurred (meals, lodging, airfare, etc.). The same holds true for meetings. Each of these items should be described in detail in the narrative. If exact costs for activities are not available, then estimate them using known information.

Salaries, often the largest component of the budget, should include prorated benefits when personnel are employed by the grantee institution. The salary and benefit allocations should correspond to institutional policy and salary schedules. If staff are employed as independent contractors, estimate an hourly or daily rate multiplied by the number of hours/days needed. In multiyear grants include annual increases.

These are but a few points to consider when budgeting for a project. At the Faculty Resource Center we are available to assist you with any questions you might have on any aspect of grant proposal writing.

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Letters of Reference

When applying for a grant, an important part of the application process is the selection of the people you ask to submit letters of reference (also referred to as letters of recommendation). Letters of reference are to give both you and the proposed project credibility and endorsement. The letters are not intended to compensate for a weak proposal but to enhance the request for funding of well-conceived research. Letters are primarily required for applications to fellowship programs and sometimes for collaborative, scholarly projects. Proposals to private foundations do not ordinarily require letters of reference.

The initial question related to letters of recommendation is consistently, "Whom do I ask?" Common wisdom suggests that the best references are those who are well-known scholars (particularly in your discipline), are well-acquainted with your work, and will write a compelling and substantive letter. Preference should be given to someone who knows your work well rather than a prominent scholar who may agree to write a reference but isn't well acquainted with you or your research. Sometimes applicants request a reference from an administrator in their institutions, such as a department chair or dean. Unless this person is a scholar in your field, this is not the best choice because he or she may be perceived as having a biased opinion insofar as a grant to an individual faculty member benefits the institution as well. Furthermore, the letter is intended to address the applicant's specific research rather than teaching or service to the institution.

Faculty members are frequently hesitant to ask the same person for yet another reference. Writing letters of recommendation is intrinsic to academic culture. It is understood that to gain stature and recognition in a discipline, the approval and support of professional colleagues are needed. Most scholars share this understanding and therefore, when appropriately asked, are willing to oblige. Just as a faculty member responds to student requests for written recommendations, colleagues who believe in and support important academic research will find the time and energy to craft a good letter of reference.

The quality and relevance of letters submitted to grantmakers vary considerably. It is the responsibility of the applicant to choose the right people and to give them sufficient information to write articulate and convincing recommendations. The cultivation of colleagues who can be important references should begin at the early stages of a career. Too many times good scholars with good ideas come up short when they attempt to identify those who can (and will) make solid recommendations for their work. This is especially true of scholars who have not published extensively.

Professional society and guild meetings are the most likely venues for making contact with those who shape your discipline. Presenting papers, participating on panels, corresponding with scholars in your field are ways to develop a cadre of professional colleagues. No matter how brilliant an idea or concept may be, it is unlikely to garner financial support if it lacks endorsement from those who are known in the field. These scholars may not agree with your ideas, but you should seek constructive input and honest impressions about your work. It is better to have any obstacles or barriers known up front so that they may be anticipated and addressed rather than have them emerge unexpectedly.

Letters of recommendation can be pivotal if your proposal reaches the final stages of consideration by a committee. The statements of colleagues can be key to informing a panel of the potential contribution of your work. Make this aspect a strength of your proposal rather than a weakness.

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